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SUBJECT: SERBIA: PRESIDENT APPOINTS NEW ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF

REF: A) 08 BELGRADE 1345, B) 08 BELGRADE 1332

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) President Tadic has named General Miloje Miletic as the new Army Chief of Staff (CHOD), filling a position vacant for over six weeks since the resignation of General Zdravko Ponos. Miletic is expected to follow the direction of the Ministry of Defense rather than pushing the policy envelope as his predecessor did. One of the other senior staff appointments announced at the same time has already sparked controversy due to his service in Kosovo during the war and the mysterious deaths of several soldiers under his command in 2004-2005. End Summary.

Acting CHOD Appointed Permanently

2. (U) Following six weeks without a permanent Army Chief of Staff (CHOD), on February 15 President Tadic announced that acting Army Chief of Staff Miloje Miletic would be named the new CHOD. Additional announcements included naming Lt. Gen. Mladen Cirkovic the new deputy CHOD, and a promotion and new position for Gen. Ljubisa Dikovic as the new Infantry Commander. Tadic also promoted Air Force commander Dragan Katanic to the rank of major-general.

3. (SBU) Miletic (56) graduated from Artillery School in the Military Academy and entered the armed forces in 1976. His duties have included Commander of the Artillery and later the Commander of the Training Command. He finished the Command-Staff School in 1995 and he graduated from the General Headquarters College in 2000. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel-General in 2006 and speaks limited English. Most observers expect him to be less proactive in advocating engagement with NATO or playing a policy role unlike his predecessor, former CHOD Zdravko Ponos, who was relieved of his duties on December 30 (reftel).

Controversy over Deputy CHOD

4. (SBU) Immediately following the announcements, Jelena Milic from the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies contacted us to express concern about the appointment of Lt. Gen. Mladen Cirkovic as the new deputy CHOD. According to Milic, Cirkovic was placed on the European Union's visa "black list" due to his war time activities in Kosovo. She also informed us of her efforts to help the families of three soldiers under Cirkovic's command who died under mysterious circumstances in 2004-2005 to obtain official explanations. The father of one deceased soldier has publicly alleged that his son was murdered in 2005 because he had spoken to others about having driven Cirkovic and ICTY fugitive Ratko Mladic together.

15. (SBU) Our EU contacts in Belgrade have confirmed that Cirkovic was at one time "black listed" due to his service in the Pristina Corps during the Kosovo conflict, but has since been removed. We have no information to substantiate or refute Milic's allegations about the soldiers who died while under his command.

Comment

16. (SBU) Given what we know so far about Miletic, it is likely that future reform and movement toward NATO are likely to reside primarily with Minister of Defense Dragan Sutanovac and State Secretary Dusan Spasojevic. While that may mean a more cautious approach than in the past, the Serbian military's continued cooperation with the United States will likely continue unchanged. End comment.

MUNTER